# THE TENURE OF PROPERTY,

AND

# NATURE AND QUALITY OF EVIL.

# TWO ESSAYS,

BY

THE REV. R. B. WIGGINS, A. M.

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SAINT JOHN, N. B.
J. & A. M'MILLAN, PRINTERS, PRINCE WM. STREET.
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# THE TENURE OF PROPERTY.

There is an excessive eagerness in the natural mind of man to acquire possessions on the earth, to get all they can, and to keep all that they can get; and this property, so acquired, is called *theirs*, to control as they please. The title is called "*indefeasible*," is "*warranted*" against all other claimants, and is declared, in the language of the deed, to "endure for ever!"

The first question that naturally arises on the subject of a *title* to property is "How was this property acquired?" How did you, A. B., acquire an individual claim to the estate which is called your own? To put the strongest case, the answer would be, "I acquired the title by rendering the full equivalent in the honest exercise of my faculties." But, *who* gave you the faculties? Nay, who made that very conjunction of circumstances, by which the exercise of these faculties has resulted in wealth in *your* case, while higher faculties and noble energies, have resulted, it may be in other cases, in earthly poverty, or the means of mere bodily subsistence? By *com-*

*mon law*, therefore, the *title* is recognized to be Divine, and the property is holden under tenure from the Lord of the Universe. He granteth to whomsoever He will!

Now, the Lord gives no absolute titles; gives neither property nor possessions to His creatures unconditionally. There is a covenant in all *His* deeds to this effect: That only is *yours* which you are willing to use for the benefit of the neighbour; either in relieving directly the pressing wants of others, according to your ability, or in controlling your property in the way of business for the benefit of society. The absence of this motive nullifies the title to what is claimed as your own, and renders you the unjust possessor of that which belongs to the rightful heirs. By this common sense view of the case, we see at once that vast numbers of the human race have no legal title whatever to their own possessions, and are consequently trespassing on the domain of the original owner. We are not now arguing the case with those who deny the "*Law*" on this subject; but with those only who acknowledge the Lord as the rightful proprietor, and who can therefore convey his own property on his own terms.

Now this is what we call the philosophy of

teaching. We are not touching the case in the mere natural point of view; we are not questioning the *bodily* right of owning property in any county, state, or kingdom; but we are regarding man as something above the animal; we are regarding him as a rational, intelligent, and immortal being, who has nothing that has not been originally *given* to him, and for the exercise of which gifts, or talents, he is held strictly accountable by the Infinite donor.

It is important therefore to get rid of the abuse of language, by which we so often call things *ours*, to which we really have no claim. This custom is fraught with ruinous consequences, for it fosters the disposition to believe that what we nominally possess properly belongs to us, that all we give to others is properly our own, and that unless *this* principle is recognised we shall decline to give at all. We thus preclude the wish to benefit others, apart from the feeling that *we* are the recognised benefactors, and thereby render the very act of outward charity the means of extending more widely the baneful principle of self-love.

Strictly speaking then, *that* only is ours which we hold subject to the original Giver: or, in other words, that only is ours which we are willing to control for the good of all,—for on that

sole condition is it given. To seek anything as our own, therefore, is justifiable only with the view of being able to give ourselves away in the active uses and charities of human life. This applies especially to what is called "seeking a living," which living itself is necessary to us, as the preparation for a life of varied duties in the world. Why, is any man insane enough to believe that the Lord has given to *him* the especial right to possess property and talents solely for *his own* gratification! That he is allowed to hedge himself within the circle of mere selfishness, without reference to the greatest good of the society in which he lives! If the life of well doing,—of diffusing what happiness he may around him, is not the end in view, then the mere accumulation of property becomes only a blight and a desolation.

There is something absurd, to the degree of being ridiculous, in a mere creature calling anything his own! Why, who gave it to you, and who can take you away from it, or it away from you, at any time, without your own consent? A pretty claim to property to be sure! A valid *title* indeed, with a *broken* covenant on *your* part. It is yours, O man, in the strict bodily sense; it is yours to count, to gloat over, to leave

behind you when you die: but you cannot *use* it, in the highest sense of the word; it is not even your servant to fetch and carry for you, because it cannot make you wiser or happier. It *is* yours only as the record of blighted faculties, of good things left undone, and of high and noble hopes desolated for ever!

Why then falsify human language, and abuse the human faculties, by speaking and acting as if wealth and possessions were our own, and to be recognised under false titles? Wealth, unblessed of God, is not wealth; for it can belong to nobody on earth, and makes nobody rich! It is enchanted wealth, and has no existence except in the minds of the insane. What they see is not gold and silver: only touch it, and it vanishes from sight. There is a spell upon it, and no one shall ever be the better for it. *This* is the simple *philosophy* of the fact.

We make the most of this life, depend upon it, when we apply it to the next. It tells then, for the seed time is here, and we cannot sow afterwards. We must look well to the *tenure* of property, of all that has been given to us in the way of talent, wealth, or influence. There is a covenant in the deed, by which the holder of any property is bound to make earthly good the

means of heavenly good, and incipient wealth in this world the means of ultimate advancement in the world to come. The title is thus perpetuated, and the inheritance becomes an "*indefeasible* inheritance." "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The old dramatist has well remarked:

> Nothing truly can be termed my own,
> But what I make mine own, by using well.
> These deeds of charity which we have done,
> Shall stay for ever with us, and that wealth,
> Which we have so bestowed, we only keep.

And the epitaph of an Italian nobleman conveys the same truthful lesson:

> What I spent, I *had*;
> What I gave, I *have*;
> What I leave, I *lose*.

# THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF EVIL
AND
# THE DISTINCTIONS OF SOCIETY.

Evil belongs not merely to the external, but to the internal man. All men act upon this truth, for they know that men are not always what they seem to be. Circumstances may mould the external character into a becoming form; but principle alone can render the man internally good. Remove the desire of approbation and the dread of censure, the promptings of self-love and self-interest, and you may measure the degree of goodness which exists within. If man cannot institute this inquiry in the case of others, he can do it in his own case; and as the world is made up of individuals, the exact truth of the principle may thus be universally tested.

This acknowledgment places men naturally on the same footing, or makes them much more like each other than they appear to be. They will be seen from this point of view, to be standing

on a common ground, and to exhibit the features of one vast brotherhood. The claims to any innate superiority of principle will be laid aside, and the existing virtues will be found to prevail just in the proportion that principles have been acquired and duly exercised. Thus the man who has great knowledge and no corresponding practice, will be found more depraved than the man who is ignorant of high principles of action, however reckless his conduct may be. In this point of view, it is easy to see that the wayward one, may be a very child in innocence compared to the man dwelling in mere external decencies without the restraints which the gospel imposes upon him. Might not this doctrine be rendered very practical in recovering to society those who are supposed to be lost to it? Might it not be a very useful lesson, in some cases, for the fine gentleman and the fine lady, dwelling at ease, and lounging listlessly through the world, to ask themselves, *Wherein* they differ from the outcasts of society around them? What made them to differ; and whether, if their circumstances had originally been reversed, they would not now necessarily be in each other's places? The solution of this question might be easily given, by inquiring into the quality of the dispositions that

are at present manifested by those who claim to be superior excellence. Do they regard the lost, as persons to be saved, if possible; or, utterly indifferent to the woes of others, do they allow the erring and the wayward to go down hopelessly to the grave? If theirs is the superior virtue, where is the record of efforts made to reclaim the erring, rule the wayward, and cheer the poor lonely souls, that are desponding under the trials and calamities that assail them? Alas! has it not often been, and is it not now, extensively true, that power and affluence and easy life have been the shield to protect the false and the evil from the tears and the righteous indignation of the injured and the oppressed?

There is often a great deal said about the depravity of the *lower classes*, of the hopelessness of the lower classes, and of the ingratitude and so forth of the lower classes. But what constitutes the lower classes; and who are they who come under the head of the depraved, the hopeless, and the degraded? What is the exact meaning of these words, and how are they to be applied to human creatures? Is it to the internal, or to the external man? Is there no internal depravity in cases where the outside is apparently as fair and beautiful as the apples of the

on a c Sea? Is there no ingratitude and no de-
of vity in claiming God's gifts as their own
property, and in claiming also the right "to do what they will with THEIR OWN?" Is there no hopelessness in cases of unmixed selfishness, in cold blooded and calculating expediency, in the maxims of mere worldly policy, and the utter disregard, in consequence, of all the principles and the spirit of the New Testament? Are there no records in that Book, showing *who* are the depraved, the hopeless, and the ungrateful? Were they not the influential members of Society at that time, dwelling in their palaces, and rolling off in their carriages to the Sanhedrim, who rejected the Saviour and nailed Him to the cross? Were they not externally decent in their conduct; nay, blameless in their observance of all the conventional usages of society, tithing the very "mint, anise, and cummin" of an externally religious life? Yes, *they* were the lower classes, and the abode of misery to which they were consigned in the future world were correspondingly dark and deep. "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of Heaven before them."

The time is coming when the Truth must be adapted to the state of the public mind, and be taught in its higher and interior signification;

when *words* must have meaning, and must be applied to the things that correspond to them. In this vocabulary, which is now forming in the minds of all noble and generous hearted men, the *lower classes* signify the earthly, the selfish, and the malignant classes, notwithstanding the conventional terms of worldly life to the contrary. The lower classes therefore are those who receive much from the Lord, and who give nothing, in return, to the neighbour for whom it was given, and who thus live in the confirmed practice of a "breach of trust." The lower classes are those who ignobly wear out the energies of life in selfish indulgence, instead of performing active uses to society for the love of use itself, and who thus squander in wasteful excess what might otherwise benefit and bless the suffering poor; these are the dishonest among men who spend upon themselves what belongs to the rightful heirs. The *lower classes*, in a word, are those who, with all the means and appliances to boot, to benefit and bless their fellow creatures, allow ignorance to exist in the essentials of religion, destitution to prevail in the physical man, vice to grow up rank from childhood, and all the disorders of sense and sinful passions to result in one wide spread gangrene upon the face of soci-

ety. It is the mission of the *higher* classes to protect and watch over the lower classes for good; and until this work is done by the higher classes to the extent of their ability, they forfeit their claims to lead and influence Society. Let none then claim to be of the higher classes, who are not willing to act up to the dignity of their mission by quelling the riot of earthly and sinful passions in themselves first, and then contributing to the extent of their ability and opportunity to make the world wiser and better. They who have rights have the consequent duties; and to claim the title and rank of the "higher classes," without fulfilling the duties of that claim, is an affront to the human understanding, an outrage upon reason and common sense, and a bold and unqualified defiance of the precepts of the New Testament, and of His authority who gave those precepts to be obeyed.